

Existential Therapy

How Exploring Meaning and Purpose Supports Long-Term Recovery



What is Existential Therapy?

Existential Therapy is a depth-oriented form of psychotherapy that explores the fundamental questions of human existence: freedom, responsibility, identity, and the search for meaning. Rather than treating surface-level symptoms, it helps individuals understand how unresolved existential questions fuel avoidance and self-destructive behavior. For chronic relapsers, this often means confronting what they have been running from all along.

How It Works: The Five Core Confrontations

- 1) Surface Core Concerns**
Identify the existential tensions driving avoidance, emptiness, and substance use.
- 2) Confront Avoidance**
Recognize how addictive behavior has served as an escape from these unresolved tensions.
- 3) Clarify Values**
Define what genuinely matters and what kind of life is worth living.
- 4) Accept Responsibility**
Embrace personal freedom as the foundation for authentic, lasting change.
- 5) Build Authentic Meaning**
Develop purpose-driven commitments that replace the pull of addiction.

Goals of Existential Therapy

- Identify existential concerns driving addiction
- Develop a clear sense of personal values and meaning
- Accept responsibility for choices and their consequences
- Reduce avoidance behaviors rooted in fear and purposelessness
- Build a self-directed, meaningful path in recovery

Therapeutic Benefits

- Reduced sense of emptiness and lack of direction
- Greater personal accountability and self-awareness
- Deeper capacity for authentic connection with others
- Greater resilience when facing life's uncertainties
- Sustained motivation grounded in personal meaning

Existential Therapy is Highly Effective For Treating the Following Conditions:

- Substance Use Disorder
- Depression
- PTSD
- Personality Disorders
- Anxiety Disorders
- Grief and Loss

Existential Therapy at Burning Tree Ranch

Many programs introduce existential concepts briefly during group sessions, but fail to give clients time to sit with the hard questions:

- “What am I actually worried about?”
- “What do I want my life to mean?”
- “What am I truly responsible for?”

For chronic relapsers, surface-level exposure to these questions has rarely produced lasting change. Our **long-term, progress-based model** gives clients the time needed to move beyond intellectual awareness into genuine confrontation with the choices and values define recovery.



“Existential therapy gets underneath the addiction to ask why. For chronic relapsers, the substance was often filling a void: meaning, purpose, identity. Our work is helping clients fill that void with something real.”

 Meghan Bohlman, LPC-S, LCDC, EMDR-Trained
Executive Clinical Director, Burning Tree Ranch



Dual Diagnosis Treatment Using Existential Therapy

Existential Therapy is particularly effective in dual-diagnosis treatment, where co-occurring conditions like depression, anxiety, and PTSD often deepen the sense of meaninglessness that drives chronic relapse. Addressing both the mental health condition and the underlying existential void at the same time is essential for recovery.

At Burning Tree Ranch, we integrate Existential Therapy with CBT, group therapy, and trauma-informed approaches to create an individualized dual-diagnosis treatment plan. The goal is not simply sobriety, but a life in which clients have genuine reasons to stay sober.

Dual Diagnosis Defined:

The presence of **both a substance use disorder and a mental health condition** occurring together. Effective treatment for dual-diagnosis addictions must address both aspects simultaneously.



Have Other Treatment Programs Missed the Deeper Issues?

Burning Tree Ranch is the Nation’s only authentic long-term treatment program for chronic relapse. Call us at (866) 287-2877 or visit us online at www.BurningTree.com.

Disclaimer: Burning Tree Ranch aims to enhance the quality of life for individuals battling substance use and mental health disorders through well-researched and professionally reviewed content. Our publications focus on the nature of behavioral health conditions, available treatments, and their outcomes. Reviewed by licensed experts, our material is informative but not a replacement for professional advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Always seek the guidance of a licensed health provider for any medical or clinical concerns.